MR. ABBOT's

# SERMON

TO

YOUNG PEOPLE.

# THE DUTY OF YOUTH.

IN A

# S E R M O N,

OCCASIONED

BY THE

DEATH OF MISS *SARAH AYER*,

*DAUGHTER OF MR.* MOSES AYER,

WHO EXPIRED APRIL 7th, 1802, IN THE 22d YEAR OF HER AGE;

AND DELIVERED

*IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE INTERMENT*

ON

LORD's DAY.

*BY ABIEL ABBOT,*

PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN HAVERHILL.

HAVERHILL:

FROM THE PRESS OF

*GALEN H. FAY.*

1802.

*REVEREND SIR,*

DEEPLY impressed with the solemn truths contained in the sermon, preached after the funeral of Miss AYER, and solicitous for the promotion of early piety, the ladies of your society venture to request a copy for the press. As this sermon was occasioned by the early death of one of our number, we hope, Sir, no other apology necessary for this application. While we affectionately remember him, who, with such fidelity and impressiveness, has so frequently enforced upon our minds the importance of religion, the beauty of holiness, may we not be unmindful of that first great duty---*to remember and love our Creator.*

*Haverhill, April* 19, 1802.

TO THE LADIES OF THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY, WHICH I HAVE THE HAPPINESS TO SERVE IN THE GOSPEL.

*LADIES,*

THE request contained in your letter you support by reasons, which I cannot resist; I readily comply with it. The defects of a sermon, written in ill health and great haste, I will forget in the hope that it may be blessed to render lasting those impressions, which you think were made at the time of delivery. At the least, it may serve as a remembrancer of the peculiarly solemn and affecting scenes of that day, which lent their impressive aid to the sermon.

The personal respect and affection and the general seriousness, exhibited on this occasion, are affecting circumstances to your Pastor; and he sincerely joins you in the prayerful wish that you may never be unmindful of that first great duty--*to remember and love your Creator.*

ABIEL ABBOT.

*Haverhill, April* 19, 1802.

A

# FUNERAL SERMON.

*ECCLESIASTES XII. 1.*

REMEMBER NOW THY CREATOR IN THE DAYS OF THY YOUTH, WHILE THE EVIL DAYS COME NOT, NOR THE YEARS DRAW NIGH, WHEN THOU SHALT SAY, I HAVE NO PLEASURE IN THEM.

As the text, ſo the following diſcourſe, is addreſſed wholly to the *young* in this aſſembly. May the bleſſed Spirit of God ſet home upon your hearts what ſhall now be ſaid. I confeſs to you that I never addreſs *you in particular*, but with a conſiderable hope of effect. Youth is the ſeaſon of impreſſions; your hearts are tender; your affections are quick; your perception is ſtrong and lively. Affecting ſubjects, preſented to you, are intereſting; their effect is inſtantly manifeſt in your countenances, which color with your feelings, and in your eyes, which are not unfrequently filled with tears. Thoſe reaſons, which make

make it particularly your duty to attend to religion, while *young*, make it the duty of your religious instructor to pay particular attention to you. Of this, I hope you will bear me witness, I have not been wholly negligent.---If your minds are at all times apt to impressions, they must be doubly so today. If you were even cold and dull on common occasions, you would feel on this. If death and eternity have appeared to you remote realities, they are brought near to you now; you have seen the power of death on *one* of your number and her spirit has winged its flight into eternity. It were strange indeed, if you should remain untouched by these things. But you are not; a combination of circumstances renders this death peculiarly affecting to very many. Some of you were united to her by the tender ties of family love. Many of you stood in natural *relation* to her, if not very near, yet it was *dear*. Many were pleasingly connected with her in learning the heavenly art of singing the divine praises; while in health you testified your respect by selecting her as one of your leaders; and now she is dead, you manifest your affection and grief by the badges of mourning for her as a sister. This then is an occasion too precious for me to lose; while *death*, and *eternity*, and *heaven* are by this event much and solemnly in your minds, I will tell you how to prepare for them. *Listen*; *consider*; *remember*.

The

The text presents to you three things to be considered.

I. A duty.

II. The *peculiar* season of it.

III. Reasons for attending to it *now*.

I. A duty. *Remember thy Creator*. This is a great duty, and by the influence it is calculated to have upon you, may be considered the principle of all religion. No doubt Solomon intended in that large sense to have it understood in this passage. To remember is to *keep in mind*. To have *God* in your thoughts habitually must keep you from *sin*, and move you to *duty*. It is a just and strong description of the wicked---*God is not in all their thoughts*. This is the reason, why they feel no restraint, why they dare to insult his name with blasphemy, and to trample on his laws with bold defiance.

Let me entreat you to discharge this great and comprehensive duty. As the first step to be taken, gain a true notion of God. Mistake not his nature; leave out of your idea of God no one of his attributes. Consider him in a transcendent and infinite degree, *great*, *wise*, *good*; *just*, *holy*, *true*. Leave out *one* of these traits, and you have not the idea

idea of God; and the influence upon your minds of remembering him would be abated, might be loſt; might be even *pernicious*. Conſider Him *great* and *mighty*, but not *good*, then what horrible terrors muſt ruſh upon your minds. You would then ſee his amazing power armed with vengeance, which no ſubmiſſion could ſoften, which no innocence or goodneſs itſelf could diſarm. Conſider him *good*, but not *holy*, *juſt*, or *true*, which words are much alike in ſignification, as applied to God. What effect upon you would the remembrance of him as ſuch a Being obtain? You would not *fear him*. You would preſume, let your conduct be as it might, that you ſhould find refuge in his *goodneſs* from every evil, from every puniſhment of your ill deſert. So to remember God, would render you tenfold more wicked.

This is ſufficient to ſuggeſt to you the neceſſity of obtaining in the firſt place a *juſt notion* of God. This do by your bibles. *Search the ſcriptures; they are they, which teſtify of Him.* The more you read, the more you will comprehend of this infinite Being. We are told more of Him in that book, than all the world *have* or *could* diſcover by reaſoning and conſidering his works. Reaſon enquires; but often doubts or heſitates on this and that point concerning God. Scripture ſpeaks out clearly; and its deciſion is *certain*. Read the bible therefore much and often to learn what *you are*

*to believe concerning God.* Thus fixing in your minds the correct idea of God, revolve it continually. Have it always at hand for uſe. Wherever you are, be impreſſed with it according to your circumſtances. *It will prompt you to every duty.* Is it *morning?* are you riſing out of your beds, on which you have been protected and refreſhed? *Remember God;* and gratefully fall upon your knees to thank *Him* for your ſafety and comfort. Is it night? and are you about to forget yourſelves in ſleep? Remember God, your Creator, the Watchman, who never ſlumbers nor ſleeps; and ſupplicate *Him* to remember and guard you. Are you in ſafety? acknowledge God's providence, as the means of it. Are you in danger? immediately look to Him for deliverance. Are you ſick? *through all means* look to his power alone to heal you. Are you dying? (that time will come) look to Him to give you eternal life.--- Through the ſucceſſive hours of the day, think on God, that *whether you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, you may do all to his glory.* Say often with yourſelves in the words of Hagar---*Thou, God, ſeeſt me!* This thought will arouſe you out of indolence; it will ſtimulate you to duty. You will think you have never done enough to pleaſe ſuch an Inſpector. You will be humbled that you do ſo little; you will ſend up a frequent petition for His help, that you may be enabled to do more and to do better.

As it will prompt you to every duty, ſo the remembrance of God will *reſtrain you from every ſin;* it will defeat your temptations. Whatever be your enticement to ſin, remember your Creator, and exclaim with youthful Joſeph---*How can I do this great wickedneſs and ſin againſt God!* Is there a temptation ſo ſtrong, *ſo violent*, as not to give back, when met by this conſideration? Wherever you may be, it is of equal force. You can retire into ſecrecy from the eye of men; and this is commonly done by the iniquitous and the lewd. But when you are retired, remember---*God is there*---your abominations, your pollutions are naked before Him. You *act* in his *preſence;* if you ſin, he will be a ſwift witneſs in the day of judgment againſt you. Did you always remember your Creator, I think you muſt *ceaſe from ſin.* There are few, who are not much reſtrained by the preſence of *men.* If they be men of reſpect, men of piety, a ſinner, ſomewhat *hardened*, bluſhes to offend them by words of blaſphemy or deeds of pollution. But what is the moſt honorable man, what the holieſt ſaint, compared with the *holy One*? That the ſinner is not abaſhed infinitely more by the preſence of God is that he *forgets Him.* He does not think Him preſent; he has no realizing ſenſe, no conviction that He ſees him. In darkneſs he thinks himſelf unſeen; in privacy he feels alone; and this deluſion is his temptation. Could he ſin? did he remember---*That the darkneſs*

*neſs and the light are both alike to God---That there is* NO *place where the workers of iniquity may hide themſelves.*---Having mentioned ſomething of the duty, enjoined in the text, let us now conſider;

II. The ſeaſon of life *peculiarly* aſſigned to it.

The ſeaſon is declared in thoſe terms---*now---in the days of thy youth.* By this we are not to ſuppoſe that it is a duty, from which others are exempted. Far from this; Solomon's object clearly is this, to have our *whole* lives brought under the influence of a continual remembrance of God. To effect this object, he earneſtly exhorts the young to ſubmit to it; well knowing that if they fix the habit at their age, there is the faireſt probability that it will be permanent as life. Knowing the propenſity of the young to think there is time enough yet; to ſay "a little more pleaſure, a little longer indulgence in ſin; and then we will be ſerious and ſoberminded;" he charges them not to defer it. Remember *now* thy Creator *in the days of thy youth.* It is not a moment too ſoon to begin; and then proceeds to give reaſons---which we will now conſider.

III. *While the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt ſay I have no pleaſure in them.*

What

What is to be underſtood by theſe clauſes may be ſeen in the context, which is a figurative deſcription of old age and death. *Of old age*---when the ſenſes ſhall be impaired; the faculties ſhattered; trifles become burthens; ſtraws be obſtacles; and the frame languiſh with diſeaſes: and of *death*, which ſhall come to cloſe the ſad train of mortal evils, *the duſt returning to the duſt as it was, and the ſpirit returning to God, who gave it.* The argument of Solomon is plainly this---"Defer not religion to old age; it is the moſt unfit ſeaſon in the world, ſhould you attain it. Deferred till then, you will have no heart and mind to duty. The ſlighteſt obſtacles will then ſtop you; ſmall difficulties will perplex you. And in the midſt of your feeble efforts, ſhould you then put them forth, death will ſurprize you." To this picture of old age Solomon reſorts to arouſe the attention of the young to religion. He bids them not put over their good reſolutions to be executed in ſo unhopeful a time as this. He virtually ſays *this* is your time *now*, *in the days of youth*, and probably your ONLY time *to remember your Creator.*

Having preſented to you Solomon's general argument, let me now diſcuſs particular ones, implied in it.

1. Youth is the *beſt* time to begin religion. Religion will never be ſo *eaſy* to you, as it now is. It

It is true, you have ardent feelings at this age and warm paſſions, which you may find no ſmall difficulty to *reſtrain*, and which it may coſt you ſome mortification to *deny*. But think you, if theſe ſhould paſs off with youth, that others as ſtrong, as evil, and as hard to ſubdue will not ſucceed to their place? I may aſſure you they will. More; your difficulties will thicken upon you. The indulgence of your youthful paſſions will lend a vigor to your manly ones. Having been the captive of one company of enemies, you will fall the ſurer prey to the next, which aſſails you. Loſe the victory in youth, and you will have little ſtrength or courage to attempt one in manhood. But a triumph over youthful paſſions and luſts, will bring you into manhood with every advantage to purſue the war with ſucceſs againſt every ſpiritual adverſary which in ſucceſſion may come to try you.

2. Youth is the *happieſt* time for religion. Religion is a matter, which has much to do with the heart and affections; and when are theſe ſo apt to their offices, as when you are young? *Never*. If you remember your Creator, never may you expect more impreſſive views of Him than now; views which ſhall awaken your awe, your gratitude, your love, your devotion. As your affections are quick and ſtrong towards their *human* objects, ſo will they be towards the *divine*, if you take the pains to ſet them. In religion therefore

you

you can *now* take the moſt comfort, if you give your heart to it; that is, much more comfort, than you *can expect*, if you ſhould have the grace to begin it later in life, when your heart will have become colder and your affections leſs ſuſceptible.

3. Religion in youth prepares you for a happy ſubſequent life. Religion is often in ſcripture compared to a warfare. The figure is juſt and ſtriking. If then in youth you are religious; if, as to be religious implies, you have in a good degree ſubdued your paſſions, and have formed holy habits; if the *great point* has been carried, you have *peace*, a ſweet peace for the reſt of your life of trial. Not indeed a *perfect* peace; this is reſerved for heaven. To continue the figure, you will have conflicts, but in theſe you will be commonly victorious; and if at times you fall, you will riſe again. Your ſtate will be *peace* compared with that of the wicked; they are in a continual conflict, conſcience ever ſtruggling and ever ſuppreſſed, though not without inflicting deep wounds in the heart. But *great peace have they, who love thy holy law, and nothing ſhall offend them.*

4. Religion in youth is a ſecurity againſt the evils of *alarmed ſickneſs* and of *hopeleſs death.* They, who viſit much among the ſick and dying, know the value, the comfort of this ſecurity. I will

will not deſcribe to you in contraſt the ſaint and ſinner, ſick and dying. I will not pretend to tell you all the peace and contentment of the former; it is not to be truly deſcribed, but by him, who feels it: nor all the conviction, ſelf condemnation, keen regret, and horrid apprehenſion of the latter; *theſe* no tongue can deſcribe, but his, who has felt them. But often have I thought, were immortality an illuſion and there be no heaven beyond the grave, it is worth a whole life of effort and ſelfdenial---*to die as a chriſtian.* This ſeems to be the point, which Solomon urges; *Remember*, ſays he, *remember thy Creator, before the* EVIL *days come*, in which thou ſhalt have no pleaſure. To remember him *then* will be only to fill you with terror if you forget him *now*. If you forget God now, the days, which are coming will be truly *evil; evil* by thoſe troubles, which your ſins will occaſion to you; and *evil* on account of ſickneſs and death. Remembering God in youth will *prevent* the former, and take away the *ſting* of the latter. Let me add once more;

5. Youth is the *only* time of religion, which is certain to *you*. This is an argument I think of irreſiſtible importance. What, is eternity certain? Are heaven and hell realities? Will the judgment ſet to decide, who ſhall go into each? Are you on the road to one or the other? Is the journey ſhort? Is the preſent moment your *only certain* time?

And

And can you lose it, and coolly run the infinite risk? "*There, may be another opportunity.*" Yes; but are *these* things to be rested on contingencies? Will you build your hope upon "*there may be another opportunity*?" If you *waste the best* season of religion; if you *despise* the *happiest* season, when will you find another? God only knows whether there be another. Grieve the Spirit of God and he will leave you, and your fate is then certain. Provoke God, and he may suddenly stop that life, which you spend in loving pleasure more, than in loving Him.

And now tell me, is there one in this assembly of the young, who can hold out against these considerations? Ought they not to be sufficient to bring you to a deliberate fixed resolution this day to *remember your Creator?* Or, must I resort to the *occasion* of this discourse? Must I point you to the *grave*, which you have just seen opened to receive one of your number and to enclose her till the morning of the resurrection? This is an appeal which *all* of you must feel, and very many of you feel perhaps too tenderly. Let this death not be forgotten; and the impressions, made by it upon your minds, never be lost. Two things I think it should teach you---*that youth is not too soon to feel the power of religion---and that a moment later may be too late;* her amiable life, and her calm, resigned, hopeful sickness prove the *first;* her early

death

death demonſtrates the *laſt*. If ſhe had a wiſh to live it was but for *one* reaſon; that ſhe *might live more to the honor of her Savior*. Life had not a charm for her but *that*; it was *vanity* in her eyes. And ſhall it have charms of every kind, *but this*, for you? Take wiſdom from dying lips. Live to that purpoſe, for which alone ſhe had a wiſh to live. *Remember your Creator and honor your Savior*.

To thoſe young perſons, who were conſtantly with her in her illneſs, or who were frequent in their viſits, let me ſay; you have been affectingly inſtructed. You have ſeen the uncertainty of life and the worth of a hope, the foundation of which endures examination. Would you wiſh to contemplate death at no great diſtance, advancing with a ſteady and certain ſtep, and yet not tremble? See that you immediately have on chriſtian armor to meet him. While in health read and love the ſcriptures, and be conſtant in ſecret prayer.

She was a *ſiſter* to many in this aſſembly, who loved her, and who have exerted that talent, which they cultivated in ſchool with her, to honor and render more impreſſive her funeral. Is it not then *particularly* incumbent on you of the choir of ſingers to improve this admonition of Providence? In the autumn of the year, ſhe probably as little expected to be numbered among ſpirits in the ſpring, as any of you. But her voice is ſilent in the ſong of praiſe; ſhe no longer delights or is delight-

ed among you by ſweet ſounds. Yet, hark! do you not hear her in the *ſong above?* where your love and charity have believed her gone. At leaſt do you not *imagine* her already charmed and engaged in the ſongs of heaven? We know not how ſpirits utter their joyful praiſes, nor how they liſten to the anthems of glory; yet doubtleſs the ſaints are inſtantly employed and wrapped into ecſtacy on admiſſion among the ſpirits of juſt men made perfect. If you indulge the pleaſing thought that your companion has arrived to that joy, prepare to rejoin her. Cultivate your hearts with as much care, and endeavor to impart to them as much ſweetneſs, as to your voices. Your ſacred art ſhould improve you in religion. It is a mean of grace; ſing always with devotion. *Feel* the praiſes you utter; and *live* as devoutly as you ſing.

With a few words more to all the young, applying the ſubject, I cloſe. Let the exhortation of Solomon and the voice of God in this funeral make the moſt laſting impreſſions on all your minds. Let them *determine* you what to do. Reſolve not faintly, but firmly, irreverſibly reſolve, to *remember your Creator*. Let this be a principle of univerſal efficacy. Let it operate in ſecret and in public, day and night. Let it be your motive to duty, and your check to temptation. Form *now* the habit of remembering Him. You have every motive to it, which can affect the heart. It is the *beſt* time; it is the *happieſt* ſeaſon of life for religion; it will prepare

prepare you for years of peace and contentment; for true and ſecure comfort in all the remainder of your lives. It will be your ſecurity againſt thoſe dreadful evils---an *alarmed, fearful* ſickneſs, and an *awful, hopeleſs death.* Religion is your guard, your only guard againſt ſurpriſe. Loſe this time, and all may be loſt. There is no promiſe of another time. *Now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of ſalvation. Watch, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. Stand with your loins girded and your lamps trimmed and burning. Be ready; for in ſuch an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.* He will come, and his reward is with him. *Even ſo, come, Lord Jeſus!*

AMEN.

LINES, SELECTED AND SET TO MUSIC BY MR. *HOLYOKE*, AND PERFORMED BY THE CHOIR AFTER SERMON.

HARK! ſhe bids all her Friends adieu;
Some Angel calls her to the Spheres;
Our Eyes the radiant Saint purſue
Thro' liquid Teleſcopes of Tears.

Farewel, bright ſoul, a ſhort Farewel,
Till we ſhall meet again above
In the ſweet Groves where Pleaſures dwell,
And Trees of Life bear Fruits of Love.

Sweet Soul, we leave thee to thy Reſt,
Enjoy thy JESUS and thy God,
Till we, from Bands of Clay releaſt,
Spring out and climb the ſhining Road.

While the dear Duſt ſhe leaves behind
Sleeps in thy boſom, ſacred Tomb!
Soft be her Bed, her Slumbers kind,
And all her Dreams of Joy to come.